

## VICENTE DE LA CRUZ MÁS PEQUEÑECES: AN ANTI-SEMITIC NOVEL OF THE 1890s

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Probably the most notorious Spanish novel of the nineteenth century was Luis Coloma's *Pequeñeces*, published as *folletín* in *El Mensajero del Corazón de Jesús* from January 1890 to March 1891 and in book form in early 1891. The success of the novel can in part be attributed to non-literary causes: the scandal of a Jesuit's writing in naturalistic vein and the widespread belief that *Pequeñeces* was a *novela de clave*, a charge stoutly denied by Coloma<sup>1</sup>. The animated debates surrounding the novel obscured recognition of its obvious literary merits: a fast-moving plot, excellent characterization, good reproduction of dialogue, considerable humor, and a vivid sense of the dramatic. The *ambiente* of the Alphonsine conspiracies of the early 1870s is skilfully etched. The aristocrats satirized by Coloma are scathingly portrayed as immoral, frivolous, and materialistic. Lurking in the background —and providing an element of melodrama— are the masons (and Coloma includes Prim, Ruiz Zorrilla, Amadeo I, Garibaldi, and King Victor Emmanuel among their number) conspiring to install a republic in Spain.

Coloma writes above all as a moralist. He castigates the superficiality and sexual scandals of a small, but prominent, section of Madrid society; in passing, he denounces gambling, dueling, the phy-

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<sup>1</sup> For a competent discussion of *Pequeñeces* and the polemics surrounding its publication, see Rubén Benítez' introduction to *Pequeñeces* (Madrid, Cátedra, 1980), pp. 9-43.

sical abuse of women, and child neglect. Such corrupt aristocrats as Currita de Albornoz use religion only as ornament; true Catholics, on the other hand, such as the puritanical and devout Marquesa de Villasis, flee mundane matters. The Jesuits are portrayed as kindly teachers, wise in the ways of the world, intransigent with vice, yet always willing to guide the penitent; the *Spiritual Exercises*, indeed, begin the process of converting Currita from her life of sin. Throughout the novel, there pervades a sense of transcendence, of the miraculous. Thus, the death by drowning of the two sons of Currita and the Marquesa de Villasis (who are found with a single scapulary wrapped around them) completes «una tremenda justicia de Dios»; as a consequence of this Providential slaughter of the innocent (and of her daughter's offering herself as a nun), Currita is restored to the Church and its sacraments.

*Pequeñeces* was immediately satirized in Blasco Ibáñez' *La araña negra* (1892)<sup>2</sup>. For the Valencian novelist, who obviously bases much of his work on Sue's *Le Juif errant*, the Jesuits oppose progress, human dignity, and religion itself, and will commit any crime in their goal of world domination. In *La araña negra*, Blasco Ibáñez refutes the major theses of *Pequeñeces* (the excellence of Jesuit education, Jesuit virtue and intransigence, the desirability of salons limited to virtuous women); Coloma (who appears in the novel as «Padre Palomo») is personally attacked.

A further reply to *Pequeñeces* —Vicente de la Cruz' *Más pequeñeces*— has escaped critical notice. Vicente de la Cruz (1848-??), a devoted follower of the moderate Republican Emilio Castelar, was a Madrid lawyer and journalist; in the early 1890s he wrote for *El Demócrata* (in which journal he reviewed *Pequeñeces*); in 1896 he became editor of *La República Española*. *Más Pequeñeces* was published in the early 1890s in two volumes, respectively entitled *El jesuita* and *El cuarto estado*. Although no publisher or date is known for the work, it formed part of a general series (which included the works of Eduardo López Bago) edited by Juan Muñoz Sánchez.

*El jesuita* begins with a defense of Spanish masons (and De la Cruz includes such *progresista* heroes as Enrique de Borbón, Riego, Torrijos, Espronceda, and Sixto Cámara among their number) and

<sup>2</sup> *La araña negra* is discussed in Brian J. Dendle, *The Spanish Novel of Religious Thesis 1876-1936* (Madrid, Castalia, 1968), pp. 47-49. Blasco Ibáñez' satire of *Pequeñeces* is treated in Dendle, «Blasco Ibáñez and Coloma's *Pequeñeces*», *Romance Notes*, 8 (1966), 200-203.

an attack on the Jesuits, who are accused of persecuting the most talented members of their order. *El jesuita* is set in the Madrid of the years preceding the death of Alfonso XII in 1885. The plot, presented, like Coloma's *Pequeñeces*, in a series of tableaux, is simple: a mysterious and dazzlingly beautiful aristocrat, Julia, the widow of the Austrian Conde de Winter, appears in Madrid, offering flamboyant society receptions and presenting enormous sums to charity, while defying conventional aristocratic female society; she is secretly involved in a far-reaching international socialist conspiracy which will establish «la verdadera fraternidad humana» (p. 167) and free women from «el yugo que vulgares tradiciones religiosas la impusieron» (p. 168).

Julia's past is revealed but gradually. Raised by a drunken father, a Madrid innkeeper, she had become a prostitute at the age of nine; her childhood experiences prevent her from feeling sexual passion or love and had given her a thirst for vengeance against society. At fifteen, such was her hatred of the *bourgeoisie*, she viciously rejected her fiancé, the mariner Carlos. Carlos thereupon entered the Jesuit Order; as Padre Alvaro, although still passionately in love with Julia, he preaches on behalf of the poor. His brother Manuel lives a life of wealthy dissipation, a cover for his masonic-socialist intrigues.

*El jesuita*, following a well-established tradition in nineteenth-century left-wing novels, savagely attacks the Jesuits. Padre Alvaro is cruelly expelled from the Jesuit Order by jealous, mean-spirited superiors, who long for the Inquisition and absolutism. As in Sue's *Le Juif errant*, the Jesuits do not represent the whole Church. Padre Alvaro dreams of a Church akin to that of the early centuries of Christianity; he is kindly received by a bishop after his expulsion from the Jesuit Order. Writing shortly after the issue of the encyclical *Rerum novarum* (May 1891), De la Cruz stresses the social message of Christianity. Thus, he notes, the Bishop of Barcelona had pleaded to no avail at the Congress of Zaragoza for attention to the *cuestión obrera* (p. 75). The Russian nihilists, who defend the oppressed, are carrying out the Christian message:

... es la transformación de la sociedad al cabo de diecinueve siglos de lucha, por las libertades que inició el divino filósofo que murió en la Cruz; el santo grito de fraternidad entre los hombres que, al tener conciencia de su fuerza, buscan la aplicación de sus derechos (pp. 104-105).

A large part of the novel is devoted to schemes of educational reform. In Julia's model *Asilo de niñas y jóvenes abandonadas*, neither French nor music is taught; rather, hygiene is stressed, and women learn trades, such as bookkeeping, in order that they may earn their living. Padre Alvaro, whose theories antedate those of Costa, demands the creation of schools for workers. Denouncing the Spanish educational system, which produces hordes of starving lawyers, civil servants, army officers, and politicians, who out of need are compelled to disrupt the social order, he, like Costa, calls for a practical education:

Menos doctores, anémicos engendros de las Universidades; menos bachilleres y licenciados, y más obreros e industriales; cultivar menos las aulas oficiales y más los campos y la agricultura en general... (p. 209).

Imitating *Pequeñeces* (and Currita de Albornoze briefly appears in *El jesuita*), De la Cruz denounces the vices of the aristocracy: frivolity, sensuality, malice, degradation (and *El Imparcial* is quoted to provide examples of aristocratic degeneracy). Like Coloma, De la Cruz abhors duels. For De la Cruz, the political leadership of Spain is bankrupt: money rules; the *Cortes* are unrepresentative, the home of scandal and disorder. The women of the middle classes, whose virtue is praised, receive inadequate education. De la Cruz' strongest concern is reserved for the poor, who in Spain live in sexual promiscuity, suffer hunger, are deprived of elemental hygiene, and who in hospitals are atrociously neglected.

In ideology, *El jesuita* is in the vein of such popular novels as those of Eugène Sue or his Spanish counterparts Wenceslao Ayguals de Izco or the early Blasco Ibáñez: the hatred of the Jesuits, the concern for the underclasses of society, the belief in an evangelical Christianity and in the reform of society through socialistic organization (which nevertheless resembles an enlightened capitalism). In style also, *El jesuita* has the characteristics of the *novela popular*. Characterization is simplistic and based on moral qualities, the extremes of virtue and malevolence. Julia and Alvaro have «volcanic» passions; their consequent sufferings take on cosmic proportions. Power (and not the honest labor advocated by De la Cruz) controls characters' lives: Julia possesses vast wealth; far-reaching conspiracies decide the fate of nations. All the defects of the *novela*

*popular* are evident in De la Cruz' work: the sentiments are exalted; characters declaim in stilted manner and dramatize their situations (Julia, for example, relates her past in the form of a story). The novel abounds in dramatic scenes: thus, Julia appears at her reception in the form of an almost nude Venus (revealing, through a fine mesh, her «contornos incomparables») to raise money for the poor and provokes an epileptic fit in a lecherous senator; Alvaro, with tremendous effort, conquers his passion for Julia; King Alfonso, acknowledging Alvaro's virtue in a cholera epidemic, shakes hands with the priest; in a further example of the sublime, King Alfonso rejects the banker Spinosa's offer of health. As in Coloma's novel, the language of *El jesuita* stresses contrast, thus: «la cobardía había triunfado del valor; la vejez, de la juventud; la maledicencia, de la caballerosidad y el honor» (p. 60). Visually dramatic, also, is the final scene of the novel, when a loathsome black larva crawls over the white hand of the dead King Alfonso XII.

The sequel novel *El cuarto estado* continues the incoherent plot and extravagant characterization—for example, Alvaro's hair turns white overnight when he realizes that his brother loves Julia—of *El jesuita*. As in the previous novel, De la Cruz criticizes the ills of contemporary Spanish society: the corruption and frivolity of the aristocracy, the horrors of child prostitution, the mania for wealth which led to orgies of speculation and destroyed the social and moral fabric of Spain, the conversion of the Stock Exchange into a nest of bandits, the looting of Cuba (pp. 96-100). In the section of the novel set in Russia, the novelist condemns Czarist terror, the orgies of Russian nobles, and the boredom of Russian women's lives. The period, for De la Cruz, is one of transition, characterized in Spain by a confusion of ideas, in which Buddhism, theosophy, hypnotism, and pornography coexist. Scenes from contemporary Spanish history are evoked or mentioned: the funeral service of Alfonso XII; the Pact of El Pardo (in which Cánovas and Sagasta renounced personal ambition for the good of the nation); the rising of Villacampa (in which noble Republicans were sacrificed to Stock Exchange speculators); and the assassination of the Bishop of Madrid-Alcalá. Among the contemporary and historical figures praised in the novel are: Pablo Iglesias, Leo XIII, Amadeo of Savoy, O'Donnell, Martínez Campos, Sagasta, Cánovas, the presidents of the First Republic (with the highest praise reserved for Castelar), and the novelists Pérez Galdós and Pereda.

As a lesson to the working class (the «fourth estate»), scenes from Spanish history are evoked. The nobility of the middle ages enforce the *derecho de pernada*; the clergy are symbolized in the Inquisition and a lustful friar, who tortures a beautiful girl to death; the third estate, on the other hand, behaves with heroism in the War of Independence. Summarizing the subsequent history of Spain, De la Cruz admits that Spain is not yet ready for a republic; the disorders of the canton of Cartagena are explained by the presence of disguised Carlists among the cantonalists.

The identification of the teaching of Christ and rebellion against tyranny is established throughout the novel, thus:

El [Jesucristo] levantó el espíritu abatido del esclavo y el paria, promoviendo la revolución santa que abatía los tiranos y déspotas; Él hizo a la mujer compañera en vez de esclava, y Él se manifestó en todas sus predicaciones decidido partidario de los débiles, de los oprimidos, de los desheredados... representante genuino y decidido de la libertad, no quiso establecer más fundamentos a sus santas máximas, que el amor y la fraternidad entre los hombres (p. 183).

Later, he refers to «el ideal político, religioso y social presentado hace diecinueve siglos por el divino Jesucristo; bandera cuyo lema son las inmortales palabras *Libertad, Igualdad, Fraternidad humana*» (p. 244).

In the socialist utopia advocated by De la Cruz, workers will be redeemed by morality, education, and work; capital and labor will work harmoniously together; property will be respected; no class will encroach on the rights of others (p. 169). Anarchism, which wishes only destruction, receives De la Cruz' strongest condemnation. In Chapter XVII, De la Cruz resumes his proposals for the development of Spain; stressing material, rather than political change, he again antedates Costa: the construction of railroads and canals for irrigation and navigation, reafforestation, the gathering of adequate statistics, the prevention of usury by the formation of cooperative banks («la asociación de pequeños capitales en sociedades dirigidas y manejadas por la honradez y la probidad cristiana, no por los vampiros judíos», p. 264).

Some fifty pages of the novel are devoted to the description of *El Taller Universal*, a model community established with the wealth of Julia to obtain the «redención del obrero» by putting into prac-

tice the theories of Christ. Christian theories apparently demand enormous capital expenditure: *El Taller Universal* contains model farms (with the most advanced machinery), factories, workshops, gymnasia, Froebel schools (the nation is to be based on the *maestro de escuela*), a theater, a bakery, a dairy, a library, and numerous other examples of modern civilization. Women have their full role in redemption: the pharmacy is staffed by women (for, it is observed, women can perform many of the tasks of men); women are happily engaged in making artificial flowers; their health is preserved, for they wear neither corsets nor high heels (p. 283). An element of nationalism is also present: Spaniards design their own fashions, rather than import Parisian modes; the bakery produces better goods than those of Austria. The workers, appropriately delighted with the benefits of profit-sharing, cooperative purchasing, and benign capitalist masters, rush to defend the *Taller* from an anarchist attack.

The most striking element in *Más pequeñeces*, however, is its strong anti-Semitism. The intrigue in both volumes is provided by the machinations of the Jewish banker Isaac Spinoso to obtain the revocation of the edict of 1492 expelling the Jews from Spain. Spinoso, through usury, controls industry, commerce, railroads, and governments; the masonic-socialist conspiracy is merely a front for his operations, its members his unwitting dupes. For four centuries the Jews have thirsted for vengeance, as they plot their return to Spain:

... es un error crasísimo creer que la raza judía olvida nunca; con la transmisión de la herencia está unida su íntima solidaridad: la transmisión del odio y la venganza, y puede asegurarse que en este punto están completamente como hace cuatro siglos (*El jesuita*, p. 172).

The Jews, persecuted and despised in Eastern and Central Europe, await their moment of triumph, their reestablishment in Spain; the leading roles of Disraeli and Crémieux in English and French society attest to Jewish success (*El jesuita*, p. 186). Jews who convert to Catholicism do so merely to further the conspiracy (p. 174). The description in the novel of the tentacles of Jewish power controlling the thrones and wealth of Europe is, the author assures us, but a pale reflection of reality (p. 172). Spinoso's agent, the Jewish doctor

Max Muller, offers to cure the dying Alfonso XII of tuberculosis if the edict of expulsion is revoked; the King heroically refuses to sell his conscience: «como rey católico, no puedo; como español, no debo» (p. 203). Alvaro advises the King that the return of the Jews would provoke a religious war (p. 265), and that they will use their financial resources and acumen to destroy the nation (p. 267).

The anti-Semitic note is even more marked in *El cuarto estado*. Spinosa, cowardly by nature (he is the product of the Frankfurt ghetto), plots murder and civil disorder to wreak vengeance on his Spanish opponents. Behaving with disrespect at the elevation of the host during the funeral service of Alfonso XII, Spinosa is forced to his knees by Manuel («¡De rodillas, judío!», p. 43). Jews, the author informs us, are incapable of pardon (p. 44), are full of hatred and rancor (p. 71), and are parasites interested only in money:

... el banquero judío, naturaleza mezquina, constitución degradada, triste herencia de una raza cuyos individuos parece llevan en sus venas oro derretido en vez de sangre hirviente y generosa... (pp. 42-43).

El judío es, ha sido y será siempre un parásito que vive a expensas de la sociedad que le acoge en su seno; ni agricultor, ni laborioso, sólo puede ejercer el agio, la usura, la mentira y el fraude; si no, fíjense los lectores; ¿dónde se hallan sus grandes poetas, artistas, sabios o guerreros? (p. 100).

Jewish banks had ruined France after the Franco-Prussian War (p. 104); in Spain, Jews smuggle on an enormous scale, control the stock exchange, and foment risings to carry out financial coups. Finally, De la Cruz quotes the notorious *La France Juive* of Edouard Drumont (translated into Spanish in 1889) as evidence of a Jewish conspiracy (pp. 317-318).

The relevance of De la Cruz' anti-Semitism to the Spain of the early 1890s requires knowledge of the initial stages of the movement (which, under the aegis of Dr. Angel Pulido, achieved some renown, if few followers, in the early years of the twentieth century) to allow Jews to settle in Spain. In December 1868, Serrano had declared, in response to an enquiry by French Jews, that the Edict of Expulsion was canceled, since religious freedom was now gua-



ranted in Spain<sup>3</sup>. In June 1881, spurred by the leading English Jew Haim Guedalla, Sagasta, with the agreement of Alfonso XII, accepted that those Jews fleeing Russian pogroms could settle in Spain. From 1886, Isidoro López Lapuya, the editor of *El Progreso*, led a campaign to encourage Jewish immigration, which he believed would bring financial and intellectual benefits to Spain; again in 1887, Sagasta declared that Jews could reside in Spain. In fact, in the absence of financial assistance, very few Jews came to Spain; the refusal of the government formally to revoke the Edict of Expulsion (Sagasta's declarations were based on the constitutional freedom of religion) rendered Spanish hospitality dubious in the face of popular and priestly anti-Semitism.

That De la Cruz was addressing, in novelized form, the contemporary debate concerning the readmission of Jews to Spain is confirmed in the Introduction to *El cuarto estado*. Here De la Cruz weighs the objections to the return of the Jews in a much more dispassionate tone than that of the crude anti-Semitism of the novel; note also his outline of the Regenerationist argument (which was that of Lapuya) in favor of the practical benefits of a Jewish presence:

... no soy partidario de que los judíos vuelvan a España, pero no dejo de respetar el pensamiento de los hombres que, pesando el pro y el contra, creen que el materialismo del proletariado español tendría en los israelitas, que en general son fervorosos creyentes y adoradores de un Dios por espíritu, remedio muy eficaz; y también creo que son capacidades para gobernar, especialmente en Hacienda, y que tal vez pondrían remedio al desbarajuste de la nuestra; reconozco también con los que tal piensan, que son hombres de talento científico, que tal vez sacarán a España del marasmo, superficialidad y fanatismo que la distingue de las demás naciones; y que, finalmente, su condición de hombres y con arreglo a la tolerancia que siempre les dispensaron los Sumos Pontífices y los hombres grandes y santos como San Bernardo y San Fernando, pueden reclamar un pedazo de suelo de esta su antigua patria que adoran y que un tiempo ilustraron (p. 14).

Coloma's Catholicism, exemplary though it may be, is that of the *bien pensants* of the late nineteenth century: an austere morality, devotion to the Sacred Heart, obedience to the priesthood, fear

<sup>3</sup> The information in this paragraph is taken from Haim Avni, *Spain, the Jews, and Franco* (Philadelphia, The Jewish Publications Society of America, 1982), pp. 7-33.

of freemasons, a relative unawareness of the needs of the dispossessed, a belief in miracle. De la Cruz, on the other hand, despite his novelistic ineptitude, better reflects a society in painful transition. He stresses the sufferings of the working classes, exposes the miseries of child prostitution, and calls for female emancipation; he appeals to human effort and intellect, rather than divine intervention, to solve the problems of mankind. His ideology (as perhaps befits a follower of Castelar) is a confused mishmash of progressive theories: he believes that capitalism and socialism will work harmoniously together; he urges workers to practice morality; he praises both masons and Leo XIII (who had denounced masonry in the encyclical *Humanum genus* of 1884); he, like many sentimental socialists of his time, hails Christ as the apostle of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. At his most practical, De la Cruz anticipates Costa and the Regenerationists: he despises the political establishment; he demands educational reform (with a stress on primary and vocational schooling); and he calls for the material development of Spain. The most striking element in *Más pequeñeces*, however, is its anti-Semitism. I have commented elsewhere<sup>4</sup> on the virulent anti-Semitism, both racial and religious, of Emilia Pardo Bazán, whose prejudices had their origin in right-wing Catholic circles. In De la Cruz' novel, we have what I believe to be the first example of a Spanish anti-Semitism of the left. *Más pequeñeces* responds directly to proposals to allow Jewish immigration into Spain. De la Cruz' opposition, based on economic rather than religious grounds, ominously anticipates the anti-Semitism of the twentieth century.

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<sup>4</sup> See Dendle, «The Racial Theories of Emilia Pardo Bazán», *Hispanic Review*, 38 (1970), 17-31.